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bark". Dietrich provides eleven notes to Ibn al-Baiṭār's commentary and, as he does in all entries, attempts to identify the plant in modern nomenclature. In this instance, however, Dietrich says, "The plant's identification is very doubtful, perhaps impossible to know". And, he references his discussion of the plant in his *Dioscurides triumphans*. The reverse happens as well. As an illustration, the plant, *lūqāganīā* (Greek: *lenkakantha*, III. 19, p. 158), Ibn al-Baiṭār glossed, "A thorny plant that I do not know." In his note, Dietrich says that it is "vielleicht" *Cirsium tuberosum* L. and may be other related species of the Composite family. At times, Dietrich is more precise than the evidence should allow. For example, he says that *qināmūmun* or cinnamon (I. 14, p. 43) is *Cinnamomum ceylanicum* Nees, but neither he nor Ibn al-Baiṭār could have known the exact species. Various cinnamon species were routinely interchanged and, besides, the plants were not known as a whole. Its bark, often ground, was an import item.

Although botany was the focus of Ibn al-Baiṭār's research, occasionally he related data on therapeutics. The reason is apparently because the plant usage could help with identification. For example, the white peony (III. 135, p. 208) is the kind employed against epilepsy. The chaste tree (*aḡnus*, I. 104, p. 75) causes one to sleep, thereby interrupting sexual desire. On this Ibn al-Baiṭār may have been a greater linguist than pharmacist because he knew that *agnos* in Greek meant "fruitless". He may have surmised that it repressed sexual desire whereas its effect was as an anti-fertility agent, not a soporific.

The question arises as to why the commentary deals only with Books 1–4 of Dioscorides' *De materia medica*. Is the manuscript incomplete or did Ibn al-Baiṭār intentionally omit Book Five? Dietrich believes the latter because the book contained medicines with wine. Ibn al-Baiṭār's Islamic scruples caused the omission. This reviewer doubts the hypothesis, because his larger work, *Kitāb al-Ġāmi*, contained mineral drugs that are discussed in Dioscorides' Book Five (and more prominently than wine-based drugs). Second, there are compelling medical reasons not to exclude alcohol-based medicines. Some plants have their active ingredients soluble only in alcohol, a fact that some physicians of the time knew empirically. Third, Ibn al-Baiṭār is called a botanist in the prefatory prayer to his work. Dietrich may be correct about the intentional exclusion of a commentary on Book Five, but his suggested reason that it is to suppress information on wine, may be wrong.

In producing the translation and scholarly notes, Dietrich acknowledges the assistance he received from a number of specialists. Because of his devotion to detail and meticulous scholarship in tracking down the nuances of a technical work, Dietrich deserves high praise. This is a work useful to us and to generations to come. Ibn al-Baiṭār *Tafsīr* is an important achievement in the science of botany; Albert Dietrich's *Ibn al-Baiṭār* is a substantial achievement in the history of botany.

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ADAM GACEK, *Arabic manuscripts in the libraries of McGill University: Union Catalogue*, Fontanus Monograph series, Montreal, McGill University Libraries, 1991, pp. xviii, 291, illus., \$56.00 (0-7717-0211-6).

The various library collections at McGill University hold over 650 Islamic manuscripts, and Adam Gacek's union catalogue of the Arabic texts now provides researchers with detailed information on 265 different compositions, the McGill copies of which have long been neglected by scholars due to the inadequate or flawed data previously available. Almost all of the traditional Islamic disciplines are represented, but the catalogue is of special importance to historians of medicine for the materials it covers from the Osler Library.¹

Sir William Osler (1849–1919) was an avid collector of rare medical books and manuscripts and built up his collection in the days when it was still possible to do so at a rapid pace and at modest prices (few of his purchases cost more than £4.00). The Osler collection today contains 79

¹See Charlotte Gray, 'The Osler Library: a collection that represents the mind of the collector', *CMA Journal*, 1978, 119: 1442–5.

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Arabic manuscripts (almost a third of McGill's Arabic holdings) comprising copies of 62 different works. The manuscripts collected by Osler were acquired mainly from a professional colleague in Hamadhān in western Iran; others were obtained later and originated in the collections of two well-known Islamists: the Russian scholar V. Ivanow, and the German physician and Arab medical historian Max Meyerhof.

The manuscripts range in date from 611/1215 (no. 141) to the early twentieth century, and include many of the leading works of medieval Arabic medicine: e.g. partial copies of such massive compendia as the *Al-Ḥawī ft l-ṭibb* by al-Rāzī (no. 65) and the *Kāmil al-ṣinā'a al-ṭibbiya* by al-Majūsī (no. 96), and exemplars of the *Al-Mughnī ft l-ṭibb* by Ibn al-Bayṭār (no. 143) and the *Al-'Umda ft ṣinā'at al-jirāḥa* by Ibn al-Quff (no. 256). The most important manuscripts would seem to be a complete Indian copy of Ibn Sīnā's *Al-Qānūn ft l-ṭibb* (no. 161/3), dated 975/1567 but with an attested line of transmission from the author's autograph, and the first volume a fine Iraqi copy of al-Ghāfiqī's *Jamī' al-adwiya al-mufrada* (no. 102), copied in 654/1256 and containing 367 coloured drawings.² There are also numerous manuscripts (nos. 32, 33, 36, 69, 103, 117, 160, 178, 203, 228, 251), usually dating from the eighteenth century and later, which are works by anonymous or unknown authors on various medical subjects. Such manuals are typical of later Ottoman times and offer important insights into medical education and practice in this era.

Gacek offers accurate and detailed descriptions of the manuscripts, although for the more obscure works it would be useful to have fuller incipits and excipits (these latter are often omitted) and somewhat more information on the contents of the text. Special notice should be taken of the fact that his well-known expertise in Arabic palaeography allows Gacek to assign many manuscripts to specific parts of the Islamic world based on distinctive features of the scripts. There are also 71 black and white and 8 colour plates, and 47 pages of detailed indices and concordances (essential since the manuscript entries are arranged alphabetically, rather than by subject).

This catalogue is a welcome addition to the reference literature on Arabic manuscript collections, and does full justice to one such collection which can now begin to receive the attention it deserves. At a time when North American publishers are offering some truly awful examples of shoddy production where the Arabic script is concerned, the McGill University Library merits special notice for the superb job it has done in producing this handsome and clearly edited volume.

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FRANCES AUSTIN (ed.), *The Clift family correspondence 1792–1846*, CECTAL Occasional Publications No. 5, Sheffield, Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language, University of Sheffield, 1991, pp. xxi, 265, illus., £25.00 (hardback, 0–907426–04–2), £8.50 (paperback, 0–907426–03–4).

These are the letters of a Cornish family of two sisters and four brothers. All the children eventually left their Bodmin home and scattered to various parts of southern England; these letters were their attempt to exchange information about their respective lives. There is much here of interest to the social historian. Some of the letters, for instance, describe a textbook early-modern food riot designed to halt the export of corn (p. 55). We also learn of the strong disapprobation that acts of bestiality might provoke during this period (p. 187). The mentality of the era is further illuminated by the supposition that the timely collapse of a roof on witnesses in a criminal matter could cast doubt on the veracity of their testimony.

The chief interest of these letters to the medical historian derives, however, from the fact that the youngest of these siblings was William Clift (1775–1849), John Hunter's last apprentice and the first Conservator of the Hunterian Museum. Clift entered the Hunter household because of

² On this latter work, see Gacek's fuller description in his 'Arabic Calligraphy and the "Herbal" of al-Ghāfirī: a survey of Arabic manuscripts at McGill University', *Fontanus*, 1989 2: 37–53.